POETRY QUARTERLY

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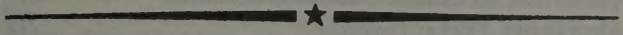

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Typography by Seán Jennett

EDITORIAL

We are now beginning to feel ourselves entering into what, to this century, is becoming familiar. Post-war, or the time after a war. The shape of the new period is clarifying out of the dust and smoke of the collapse of a civilization and a way of life. How will it affect poetry? After the 1914–18 war poetry suffered one of the greatest revolutions or changes in taste it has probably ever undergone in its history in this country. It did not by any means all happen in a year or two, but was spread over at least ten years, and lasted well into the thirties. True, it had been going on during and before the war with the work of Pound and Eliot. It could hardly be said, however, to have reached anything like a full tide before 1922 with the publication of Eliot's *Waste Land*, and many people discovered Eliot only for the first time with his *Poems* 1909–1925. The period of change was then perhaps at its greatest from 1925–30, not till seven years after the end of the war. There is little doubt though that the war had created the atmosphere necessary for the success of their work with the public. It is unlikely that there will be no change after a still more devastating upheaval. It also seems unlikely that it will be so profound, because the poets of the twenties and thirties have already effected a lasting change in the technique of English verse which, in my view, will remain unchanged except for some re-orientation in imagery and, perhaps, content. The weight of the impact of Pound and Eliot and later of Auden remains with us.

To ninety per cent. of the readers of POETRY QUARTERLY all this is common knowledge. At least, I sincerely hope so. It may seem unnecessary to repeat it, but it is precisely the ignorance of what has been done and the change in modern taste that makes the conservatives who think the old forms still in use at the end of the nineteenth century necessary to verse cry out that modern poetry isn't poetry at all. They were content to change with Browning and Bridges, but Owen, Pound, Eliot and Auden belong to a world completely foreign to them.

It will be asked what new poets have risen into fame as Pound and Eliot and Miss Sitwell rose out of the first war, and Auden, Spender and Day Lewis with the younger generation in the thirties. And those last three names bring out an extremely irritating tendency in the public which likes to know who the best contemporary poets are without much troubling to read them at first hand and deciding for itself. It appears to be incapable of remembering more than

three names at once, so that in many distant parts of the world and in quite a lot of contemporary text-books on modern poetry now those three names are still synonymous with the younger English poets. I have heard Dylan Thomas, George Gascoyne and George Barker nominated as successors to the old triumvirate. They may be able candidates, but why only three. Why does one hear so little of the work of Alex Comfort, Nicholas Moore, Henry Treece, John Heath-Stubbs, Seán Jennett, Ruthven Todd, W. S. Graham, David Wright, Howard Sergeant, Denise Levertoff and others who are all worthy of study.

Another lamentable ignorance of the public for which it is not so much to blame because the books are not available in this country, and only business men can do much travelling, is the great body of work done in America. American poets such as Wallace Stevens, E. E. Cummings, Conrad Aiken of the older generation, and Kenneth Rexroth and Kenneth Patchen, and many more of the younger generation are completely unknown to any save a specialist public here. It is to be hoped that a more international interest may develop and not be crushed by the acute xenophobia now raging among us.

GEORGE REAVEY

Hiroshima and After

To John Hersey

The bud of doom is clocked above my head
Like a lamp hung in a receding room
Unlit until the ravished second splits
The shuddered hour booming the magic daze
Until the lilac sundering light
Snaps the ravelment of a tragic ending
Stripping the beggar of his meagre rags
The scorched minions of the flash of hope
An upstart world of the flesh of marvels
Here are the bones of your delusion
The loom of power and the crumbling
Of tall pride in a meteor shower
The scrap-heap the dust and the licking flame
And O the crushed heart among the morning-glories
O wind O night O mind O light
O world discovered in a pulp of shame
In a room too small for such a flowering.

ALAN ROSS

England

With the night on her shoulder,
diagonals of landscape emerging
to sunlight, England balances
on water poems and chances.

Survival like a fever burns ashes
over Europe, the Atlantic calling
the foundling and actress to worship;
the sailor leaves a wet kiss on her lip.

Voyages like competitions slowly begin;
the cold journey that in the heart
spins dreams and responsibility,
allows for war no compassion or pity.

Columbus at the centre nailed
across worlds of water, England
like a network of beacons gathers
in the returning wishes of her fathers.

Facing a continent of nightmare
the dark hair of the channel
wraps the coast like a bandage
an immunity to fear and to bondage.

Where always the lost dream hovers
over the past of oceans and achievements,
and the future holds in its awnings
the omen of the gale morning.

England, O if your dream dies
then closed under eyelids of sea
the water of dark tides will advance
and destroy the poem and the last chance.

Poem for a Mutual Sorrow

Distant now as so long our dreams hesitated
over water I turn towards you in your hurt
beloved whose grief lies over mine locked
in the shell of the heart of your daughter
and know now we have the most deep, the same loneliness:
the fallen column of hopes lies in the still sleep
where worlds grow dim, strangled under oceans
hidden from sunlight in the lost, the mourning night.
Here I can stretch only words to your listening, child-
image in hands always similar, and my voice holding
a different accent, phrases different in meaning, now
where alone I learn to offer devotion and prayer
I hope for the future. And strong in my fingers, images
I urge into life that will keep you from hurt, a glass
house where your truth and your beauty, O now my
beloved may flower in evidence, alive with your sense.

EDGAR FOXALL

After Byzantium

They that come after us shall have strange dreams,
dreams of the sea, for they shall turn again
to space, the restless blue enamelling wave,
and white bird's knife-like glinting in the light.
They shall adventure down an endless path,
sea meadow opening wide its arms of foam,
find strength in night's sheer cliff of stars,
watch the sun rise and seek a resurrection
of fire in blood, hunger within the marrow.
So that their bones shall put upon themselves
fine immortalities of simple being,
and a great carelessness shall send them forth
beyond our whimperings at the edge of hate.

And as to this day now—what empire is?
What throne or two now matters? How shall we
coming our lesser way, their knowledge know?
How shall we contemplate their vast ambition,
the towers that will be rising where we fall?
For there is yew not laurel in our blood,
and crow and hyacinth do celebrate
the loamy utterance of our funeral.

Alien

Of that world there is nothing more to be said.
Night falls from a dark spume of hills
on the stranger, silent upon the marsh
where one red star appears, low, without heat.
The world he was is memory, the silence waits
for eyes to appear among the sedges,
where the remaining virtues of that world
speak in low voices which are not now current.

He waits, his cloak folded,
his passive hands thin as early ice
when the hoar lies on the first hour
and the mallard skirrs to rest. There is nothing more to be said.

He shall hear, among the clucking peats,
footsteps without feet, and other and beckoning noises.
He shall see the marsh lights glimmer among the sedges,
falling in small rings on the seeding moss.
He shall remember, and pray for the soul's freedom,
free as the wind of the dark on its mysterious way,
free as the white albatross.
He shall pray for the dead, who is in death's circle,
and his cloak shall become a shroud in the stiffening frost.
Fading, he shall remember the wild swans at Coole,
and the violet dusk of as great a poet.

K. H. HAVART

The Limitations of Language

The trumpets of our tongues are clumsy, dull, unfitting instruments.
Like silted sluice gates, impotently oozing in channels made by floods,
We publish only fractions to the world of our crammed hearts;
While in the bony hinterland of thought the splendid waters lie,
Full glittering lakes, real only to themselves.

We may attempt description, but all our words can raise,
And all the stranger-world could read, whatever written,
Is blurred print and crippled echo, all mirage false.

Ah, like geographers we may describe those regions:
The broad levels taking colour from the wind and the deep meadows that embank them,
The rising of corn and clover, through insect choirs and flowery censers swung,
To the subtle margin of tame and wild, to the tall grass and the sheep tracks.

We could map each speaking stream that parts those valleys;
From its last smooth surrender, richly restrained among rush and lily,
Back and back, higher still, with more arresting accent,
To its harsh parents, the dark rock and the grey pool.

And finally survey the peaks that overlook this country:
Christen them, measure by triangulation,
Praise their black and white rhetoric,
Feel awe in their solitude and love in the lines of their beauty.

But we have not the voices of the streams,
Cannot sigh and breathe as the waters of the great valleys,
Nor state the truth in silence like the bottoms and the slopes;
Above all, cannot sing in triumph like the heights.

We can only stumble and slip over vowel and consonant;
And through our mouths, on stiff worn meanings like dead leafless trees,
We crucify our hearts.

ALEX COMFORT

Song for the March

Now on the night march
now in the dark time
you who have sung before
give us a song, now.

You are the voice of the dead
you are our tongue, speak—
sing with the numberless throat
of the dead and the weak

Should that song once rise,
and should they live again,
a wind of voices will spring
joined in my single voice

You have desired a song
should we dare to sing
though you kill all of us
the song will go on.

This has goodness, breath,
a blade against history
a blow at the old lie
life in time of death

this has culture, grace
the conscript who disobeys
a prison roof in a blaze
a heel in a ruler's face

this is our poetry
every command that finds
a hand that takes a hand
voices like rising winds
and the running street.

ROBERT PAYNE

The Mouth of the Lion

I am delivered out of the mouth of the Lion,
Through the barbed teeth, the hot throat, the winding entrail
Warm with a benediction.
I am made free of the Lion's body, the snake-like motion,
Spewed into sunlight into the clean blue air
Where the trees stand on guard, where the armed archangels
Stand, and the dew lies on the grass in the evening.
There are no pud-marks.
Now there is only light, armour, the way backwards and forwards
Free of the lion's belly, not moving according to instructions,
But going my own way, as the wind takes me:
A leaf falling, a root dying.
Another comes to take its place.

Through the wet red rocks come forth like a hound I come:
Solitary in the evening, away from the lion's mouth,
Free, splendid, exulting,
The slime of the Lion still on me.
I shall bathe in the green waters, I shall forget the stench of his nostrils.
Excita. Spewed into sunlight. In love with the appearing of God,
Seeing the leaves clean, the angry light still burning in them,
Dazzled by the forest, the absence of the lion's breath,
The air like the touch of hands, the nostrils expanding, the senses adequate, the breath rising
Free as the thunder, no longer contained in the animal,
The roaring forgotten, the boy sleeping, the girl gazing over him.
So I would have all men escape from the belly into the garden,
Into the cleanness of evening, the passionless and cooler air.

I hold that when you have escaped from the lion's teeth,
Slithered over the rough tongue, no longer in the red mouth,
This is the time of love, the time of awakening,
As a baby falls from a womb, you fall from the Lion's tongue:
Tufts of hair, sodden dew, interminable coiling of entrails—
All these forgotten in the cool of the garden.

KENNETH REXROTH

The Signature of All Things

I

My head and shoulders, and my book
In the cool shade, and my body
Stretched naked in the sun, I lie
Reading beside the waterfall—
Boehme's 'Signature of All Things'.
Through the deep July day the leaves
Of the laurel, all the colours
Of gold, spin down through the moving
Deep laurel shade all day. They float
On the mirrored sky and forest
For a while, and then, still slowly
Spinning, sink through the crystal deep
Of the pool to its leaf gold floor.
The saint saw the world as streaming
In the electrolysis of love.
I put him by and gaze through shade
Folded in to shade of slender
Laurel trunks and leaves filled with sun.
The wren broods in her moss domed nest.
A newt struggles with a white moth
Drowning in the pool. The hawks scream,
Playing together on the ceiling
Of heaven. The long hours go by.
I think of those who have loved me,
Of all the mountains I have climbed,
Of all the seas I have swum in.
The evil of the world sinks.
My own sin and trouble fall away
Like Christian's bundle, and I watch
My forty summers fall like falling
Leaves and falling water held
Eternally in summer air.

WREY GARDINER

The Unsuspected Wings

We who lie destitute in the flame of time
Are the sick men of Europe, bespectacled but bloody,
Unable to tune the mouldering harpsichord of desire
In the unending century of hope delayed.

Waiting in the agony of this garden of despair
We sing our feeble songs of nightmare hours,
The vigilant and flickering rusticity of death,
Thoughtless of to-morrow, severed from the dream.

In the undying agony of an unspeakable dawn,
Haunted by crosses and driven by our means
We carry the image of the children unborn,
The future of fire and the waters of peace.

The symbol appearing in the silence of the tomb
Of untiring reliving of wasted echoes
Of a sound we heard in the bright and terrible night,
The fear flying with the gleam of history,

Sometimes desiring the impenetrable glory in the gloom
Of the gold in the darkened room,
The power and the passion of our unwanted love
In the passing of the unsuspected wings of the dove.

G. C. H. GOODWIN

Poem

See, he slips back into Eden
Like a green boy into water,
Slides an arm over the winding gate
And melts, a crooked shadow
Into the smoke and the leaves.

FRED MARNAU

Twice Thirteen Lines

Wandering along. Autumn. What brings the wind?
The rain's dust. Two heretics, stiff-legged storks,
haggard companions, the Englishman and I,
of the Danube-valley. With our sticks we climb
Golgotha, the rabble's town, along the rosary
of houses where the police invariably first appear
when somewhere in the parish a jacket or a horse
is missing. Thieves' huts they are then, thieves' alleys.
But nestled within their rows all the continents,
parsons have their stables of devotion and repentance.
Thus then we climb from Jehova up to Holy Teresa,
until the hat of thorns on top of the hill, where the thieves
slumber astonished, with its tablets us receives.

This is the last century's day of rain, not
Nagasaki, Auschwitz, Budapest. Chalk-roses in the grass
under bluish glass-hive, memento of silk-sweetened
times of life, adjudged and interred. But not here
can be imagined the tragic flight of the dead,
absent from our earth, or the future's
never returning men, stranded on a strange
moon. What they in spring had desired was fulfilled,
a luck of lesser kind, in constant reach. In summer
joy befell all of them. But wildly autumn broke,
like death inaccessible, into this century.
O how polite once even the rabble was! But we two
stand muffled in black wool here under the roof of heaven.

(Translated by ERNST SIGLER)

JOHN SINGER

Nothing Dies, Brother

Nothing dies, brother, poetry like fruit
Ripens and falls with whirl and scent of season
Though each anonymous bough sways like a god.

But heavy with earth and heavy with life it is,
The fingers of more than love have shaped it,
Its own round joy has draped it

Its own completeness curving into dark,
And warm with light where veins and sap drink air,
And turning toward lover and forgetfulness

The moist lips close on it, the thirsty soul
Cradles the lyric and embraces, though
Its own completeness is the poet's end.

And each anonymous bough was still a god
Within its season, and the sere spent leaves
And wind of ice could only murmur what it knew

Its own completeness must condemn it,
The round fruit hangs and falls with certainty
And melts into beginning.

The singing men anonymous at last
Knew their departures early, where to find
The scarecrow poet flapping in the wind.

The Old Ghost

Something suspended here, waiting, awaited and patient.
And light reminds us of our loneliness
And of our unimportance.

It returns, the old ghost, see it returning.
Or was it ever absent? The old, the familiar,
The faceless ghost is back, London between its thighs.

Perhaps the errand-boys whistle Aïda,
The girls talk like James Thurber,
And even the sparrows give themselves airs.

And perhaps the ghost was never there at all,
But only within ourselves, like an early nightmare.
Perhaps, after all, we imagined too much.

Though the strained, bored, hungry faces
Pour out of buses like a crazy film,
And souls click against each other like marbles.

Perhaps it's a dream, perhaps there isn't a ghost
Roaming through London, searching and searching
Waiting, awaited and final like mortal hurt.

RUTHVEN TODD

A Cage for Memory

FOR Z

Lie beside me now, my love, and softly let
Sleep soothe your head inside my crooked arm,
May you dream sweetly and never know alarm,
Nothing I say or do cause you regret.
I think I understand the horrors of the past,
The immense pride of the thwarted child,
Who lacking love and kindliness runs wild
While thin cruel lips are pouted and aghast.

The tyranny of childhood dies too hard;
In brutally apprehended dreams they come—
The bitter ghosts, the vile aunt and the prison guard
Who tried, without success, to make your beauty numb.
But, lovely, for this short night at least
Let my strong love cage memory's intolerable beast.

A Biographical Note

FOR Z

Always the plaything of his faithless heart,
Ready to fall in love, to praise
Those who brought happiness to his days,
He realized at last that he was ultimately alone,
That his heart was faceted like a semi-precious stone
And that all his loves would always hold a part.

Yes, to live quietly was the solution,
To let the loving impulses wither like the flowers
His garden held, which he would tend for hours;
To rise early and to work like hell
Indeed would help; all would be well
And he would achieve the necessary sublimation.

He would become extremely wise
And would study life in old and learned books,
Would live by chronicling the doings of crooks,
And never let his heart rule him again:
Take prophylactic measures against the birth of pain
And insulate himself against surprise.

This plan was one which sense might well approve,
He set about it with the necessary care
Forgetting the one who held far more than others' share
Of his susceptible heart, the one for whom
He'd willingly play Faustus on the brink of doom:
So pain was born anew and suckled on his love.

DANNIE ABSE

On the cross we grow . . .

On the cross we grow to a knowledgeable sanity
but it takes two people to die.
Two people in a confusion of darkness
after the flaming confluence of thighs,
after the meeting of arms like rivers, of tongues
of blossom, of the cathedrals
in the ears and the holy music.

It is good to die in love, and even
sweeter falls the death, the little silences.

Yet the purpose is the death,
not the dying, not the powerful stampede
of the animal blood, not the population
of children behind the eyes, not the wound
gaping open with flowers, half scarlet, half angry.
It takes two people to die
two people to reach the transient kingdom of peace,
when the murder is holy.

The tree drops its fruit in ecstasy,
the fruit nourishes the earth and its various movements;
but for the sex-hard tree, the naked
happiness is winter, the winter of silence and snow.

Next year, to-morrow night, there will be
the ache of different fruit and the seed falling,
and always the earth, a girl, is holy.

So come now lover, come through the rasping sun,
through the agony of light in the flailed heart,
in the anguish of all things beautiful,
to the peaks of the delicate peace, to the little sleep,
ripe and calling.

To-morrow consider resurrection, to-morrow another death,
but now it takes two people to die,
two people to undo the dawn.

JACK LINDSAY

Portrait

Her mouth leaps like a fish in the pool of her face,
her eyes are blue wands bent in the curve of water,
her hair is a straggle of straw in a knot of the sun,
and her shadow is white where the wave of the wind
caught her.

Her laughter hangs in the air like a bundle of stars,
her body is bony as a birdnest in cleft of the tree.
I met her on Sunday, lost her on Monday, good riddance,
and for luck she left the scar of a kiss on my knee.

Beauty and Pity

I see your shadow blown
on the red hillside stone,
a delicate halo of hair
and thin skirts tosst
and your sinuous body flowing
distinctly and then lost.

That pure travailing line
of undulant design
entangles all thoughts
with tenderness.
That fragile grace abides
beyond the last caress.

I fear to lift a hand
and touch you where you stand.
The frail dark vortex-flame
obscurely brings
a paradigm of pure beauty
and pity for broken things.

HENRY TREECE

Two Songs from 'Ivan Morgan and the Mermaid'

I

The lute is silent in the hall
And nose on paws the great hound sleeps:
The chargers nod their drowsy heads
And lichen up the grey wall creeps.

No longer do the fire-brands burn,
The bird lies withered in his cage;
The sentry's head has turned to stone
And bearded falls the little page.

II

She wandered in her garden
Among the jewelled birds;
I watched her through the carven gates
And sang her pretty words.

Lady, the sun is sinking low,
The pine-trees glow with red;
The riders are riding now
To their weary bed.

Lady, the sword is rusting now,
The fraying harp string's old,
And all the kine are huddling
Away from Winter's cold.

Lady, the birds are quiet now,
Silent, beak on breast.
O leave your silver dishes
And share my pauper's nest!

Song from 'Ivan Morgan and the Mermaid'

Beyond the high-walled garden
A sad child played alone;
She searched the beds for flowers
But all the flowers were gone.

She searched the boughs for apples,
Or for a dainty pear,
But all the fruit had withered
And the boughs were bare.

She searched the house for children;
But only echoes moved
About the empty galleries
Where no one ever loved.

N. K. CRUICKSHANK

The Talent

Some did not bury it but threw it away,
To burn small on the dark ground,
Fly on the snowing wind, float upon waves,
Be found by whomsoever it concerned.
And this one or that one, coming slowly,
Coming at long last, separated
By the great width of starlit centuries,
By tracts more desolate, dividing,
Than the forsakenest, winter-drifted moor,
Finding it, was consoled, was concerned;

Is comforted, alone, at midnight,—
The book open, the solitary candle
Shining, the heart, quiet, beating.

And they kiss, more cold and lonely
Than starlight's touch on January snow.

ROLAND GANT

Night of the Comet

For NADIA

You said to me—I am so weary
of this shadowed landscape,
I am exiled in this parched outpost
among people who are full of nothing.

I said to you—Do you recall
those friends, the azure sea, the sky
filled with the sun, the sound
of the bells of St. Sulpice?

This evening of autumn I have seen the fire
which glitters slashingly
across the prairies of the skies,
a rainbow of meteors.

Do you chase these comets,
these stars shining from dreams?
Do you renounce the living
for the calm of cirrus clouds?

GLORIA KOMAI

Ars Longa, Vita Brevis

Brevity lingers, scent, a strong accent
On a cut crimson rose: scatter my ash,
My summer, out of hand, not out of heart:

Enter no argument with autumn: time's
A long story told to a child by stars
And we will sleep beyond the slow telling.

NICHOLAS MOORE

The end of all these burdens . . .

For Mr. P. Bulfit-Thresher

The end of all these burdens is the same:
Death and his chilly hand, the mock of time.
The poet writes, and all he writes goes lame.

Love, that once seemed a heaven, is a game.
Art, once a proud vocation, is a crime.
The end of all men's burdens is the same.

The lovely women that one sought to tame,
The noble thoughts one sought to curb with rhyme—
All these are halted, and the hand goes lame.

Nothing is what it was—love is not fam-
ous, nor the poems aught but empty mime.
The end of all man's burdens is the same.

And there is nothing but the time to blame:
One's wit is dry, one's words jingle and chime.
The poet writes, but, Christ, his rhymes are lame.

Ah! that's the trouble—trying to make a name,
One's vanity upheld by gin and lime.
The end of every burden is the same.
The poet writes and all he writes goes lame.

VALENTINE ACKLAND

New Paulus Silentiarius

I show you to the Sun; as if you were a burning-glass
He throws the weight of his light against you
And you direct it to consume me.
I show you to the shadows, holding you out to the night,
Willing to consign you to the Shades, and the river
Dark and stilly-flowing receives you, wears
You bright as the moon set silver on its deathly water:
What fool, my desperate heart, would call that stream Lethe?

ALEXANDER FIRKS

Landscape

CRUCIFIXION

The priests are angry,
for we have only the long roots of a wind
bending its fingers into currents
of bewilderment, and strange plants
are entwined with the dark.

And in the night
a god was hanged and a rope was left,
and hangs lazy and the rain soaks;
sacrifice rainbeating, smooth hands experiencing the skin
on a lonely tree; and its roots descend.

Hungry and pitiless
the rain is absorbed and his ribs sink,
his hair is like the leaves on a willow tree,
but we only tremble when the long roots
find us and entwine the wind in our hands.

Hereafter only night
when the tumbrils have opened with their hollow echo
what the mind, searching, found intangible,
and in the crevices desire; and the wind found
fear alone and sacrifice wound into fingers.

This afternoon
is a stone falling down a well,
or a bird, and has no end
but a hollow report, empty as a spent cartridge.

ELIZABETH BARTLETT

The Kanulba Naked Women

From the Victorian sun-lit wall
Their secret, lidded faces stare
Shuttered and unaware,
Grave, and blossom-passionate.
Perfection of the golden leaf
They are; the pale
Shutting out of light, the brief
Inarticulate nun;
The interminable rhythmic fountain.

Swift from the streets of Warsaw
They lift their mute arms to me
And spill their solemn-twining bodies
Like a foaming chord to me;
And rise each to the unbroken sap,
The sweetness, behind my summer door.

It is well for me
That I am suffered
The uneven-corded heart
For you break me
When you speak to me
Murmuring.
How can I sever this
That has no severing?
There is etiolation
In the valleys;
The chill murmur of water
In the sodden alleys
Of the dying corn;
The bird's frenzied call
Over the broken sea-field
Is all languor and all
Shuddering rapture;
And no rest here.

And still they clasp
Their withered Warsaw flowers

And bend their tranquil faces
Through the tortured hours—
My immaculate women!

(*Girls With Plants*, Raymund Kanulba, Poland.
Allied Art Exhibition, Brighton, 1942.)

UNA CHEVERTON

Wreckage

Rolled under davits,
draggingly I sense the forming
faces of my loved:

such fantasies are out of country,
not to be timed in virtue:

close in my face like brine
or thin as cloud
spinning above the funnel fume my faces
in a strange gallery of spray and bone
yet still my hunger
curdles on each with tide
resurgent, breaking tooth in water, needling
eye itself to spume.

Dislocation,
dissolution of love, bring clear your faces
every one to me
beautiful over speech, design
the flaking lineaments like salt for eating
over again the old marooned ship's anchor
of this heart.

Faces I never
fired with any turquoise laughter, brows
I sealed with no achievement of sea-pearl.

To some I did not speak.

This is my spirit,
black as the sea and restless.

UNA MONK

The Tide Race

Desert-dry this coast. The bleached sand's reaches lie
In endless, level, drained monotony.
A limp blue cord, inert
Along a blanched horizon lies the sea.

Yet can the heart remember fearfully
How once the tide race ran
In hurrying inundation up the land,
With wrecks of ships and drowning eyes and hands,
Corn that the salt wave reaped, and green seas breaking
Over the ruins of the island churches,
Their tide-swayed bells how sharply, sharply crying.

Still with what ocean weed our fields are rich
Which spring tides flung far up the inland valleys,
And by an alien brightness we discover
Sea-fish, yet living in our inland streams.

W. G. BEBBINGTON

The Coming of Night

Last night I saw fear riding a cloud
And the drowning sun spreading his hair
As night and day struggled for mastery.
And fear dipped his arms in the swelling waters
And the rain fell from his finger-tips
Steaming in the blood of the sun.

Oh you who are loved and love and are glad
That the sun is warm and the rain soft, spare
One moment from your blessed state for me
And my vision: for the sons and daughters
Who feel the coldness on their lips
Of the long fingers of rain.

We have not wished for silence: we have breath
Too; we stake our claim on the sky
And the blue waters of an earthly paradise,
To lie at ease on banks and sleep.

But the silence we hear is eternally deep
And the waters are black and full of lies:
O you who live, know this: we die,
No cowards, long before our death.

GEO. SHIERS

Stone Song

The moon is posted on this smooth white stone.
Commemorated in this stable frost
A borrowed impulse lent a fist this face
Conforming ballast to a pallid concept;
Now stamped eternally is some dark menace
Taunting waves to lip their watery script
And lock an old desire implacable.

In this cold quality a spirit sank.
Cresting surges boomed below the ribs
Whispering to their own prevenient close;
With chip and crinkled grain alertly crisp
As falling snow, a black rain gathered force
To frame this posture; chiselled hacked and rasped
And froze a mask on this round eulogy.

Where once fresh seamaids murmured in the shell,
Gay harlequins among the spiral bones,
Thin waves caroused to roll and rub and shape
And set the singing edge on solitude.
The grain was deep was thumbed and etched to keep
Melodies once poised strangely on the tide . . .
Here in my palm is song in polished stone.

FORREST JOHN ROWLANDS

The Gipsy Girl

caged in defiling altars bled her soul
and down the glaring heights her red blood flowed
to run and mingle with fastidious tides

she lay in voluptuous coils of mocking hordes
who fed this searcher to their sensuous fires
and sacrificed her wildness to their lust

yet are their barbs outranged: flames that would corrupt
have seared eternal pureness on her heart
and heaven not hell hears vile tongues screech her name

wisps of morning air still weave about her breast
the dews of dusk adorn her full red lips
while through her veins the warm sirocco blows

and summer sits enthroned upon her brow
the hawk hears still her son on lonely plains
the hills still see her dance the night away

where dark pools fling her image to the stars
I am but one apart to whom God gave
a heart to love a mind to understand

quietly, through the drooping twilight, she comes . . .

A SELECTION OF RECENT AMERICAN POETRY

Chosen by COLEMAN ROSENBERGER

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

The Editor of the POETRY QUARTERLY wrote in the summer issue that 'to know what is going on abroad may do us all a lot of good'. I offer *A Selection of Recent American Poetry* as a partial report on what is currently going on in American poetry. These are new poems which have not previously appeared in print. They were chosen from MSS. which came to me in response to my invitation to a number of poets to submit unpublished work for consideration for this sleection. (Not all the poets whose work I should like to include are here. Miss Marianne Moore replied that her time has recently been wholly given over to translating, and there were others who could offer no unpublished work at the time this selection was assembled.) Another editor would have chosen other poems and other poets, but I believe that this selection is one which will show something of the variety and the worth of poetry in the United States to-day. I have added brief notes on the poets—more bibliographical than biographical—for the benefit of those readers who may want to explore their work. And finally, I want to thank the poets whose generous cooperation has made this selection possible.

COLEMAN ROSENBERGER

Eastpines, Riverdale, Maryland.
Summer, 1946.

The following pages are only a small part of the anthology, collected for us by Mr. Rosenberger. The rest will appear in later issues of POETRY QUARTERLY, and we hope to publish the whole in book form.—EDITOR.

WALLACE STEVENS (b. 1879) is the author of *Harmonium* (1923), *Ideas of Order* (1935), *The Man With the Blue Guitar* (1937), *Parts of a World* (1942), *Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction* (1942), and *Esthétique du Mal* (1945). One of American's most accomplished poets, Mr. Stevens is also a lawyer and vice-president of the Hartford Accident and Indemnity Company.

WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS (b. 1883) published his first volume of poems in 1909. His *Collected Poems*, 1921-1931, was published in 1934 and his *Complete Collected Poems*, 1906-1938, in 1938. His more recent poetry includes *The Broken Span* (1941), *The Wedge* (1944), and *Paterson* (1946). He is also the author of four distinguished volumes of prose: two novels, a volume of short stories, and a volume of interpretations of American history. Like Wallace Stevens, Dr. Williams has had two careers; he is a practising pediatrician in Rutherford, New Jersey.

MARK VAN DOREN (b. 1894) has had an active career as poet, critic, novelist and editor. Poetry from a number of earlier volumes was included in his *Collected Poems*, 1922-1938, which was awarded the Pulitzer Prize. His later volumes of poetry are *The Mayfield Deer* (1941), *Our Lady Peace* (1942) and *The Seven Sleepers* (1944). He has written critical studies of Thoreau, Edwin Arlington Robinson, John Dryden and Shakespeare. Among the many volumes which he has edited are *The Oxford Book of American Prose* and *An Anthology of World Poetry*.

GENEVIEVE TAGGARD (b. 1894) brought together work from volumes in her *Collected Poems*, 1918-1938. More recently she has published *Long View* (1942) and *Slow Music* (1946). Miss Taggard is also the author of the biography *The Life and Mind of Emily Dickinson* and the editor of several anthologies.

ROLFE HUMPHRIES (b. 1894) is the author of *Europa* (1929), *Out of the Jewel* (1942), and *The Summer Landscape* (1944). He is co-editor of *And Spain Sings: Fifty Loyalist Ballads* (1937) and translator of Lorca's *The Poet in New York* (1940).

RUTH LECHLITNER (b. 1901) is the author of *Tomorrow's Phoenix* (1937) and *Only the Years* (1945). She has also published considerable criticism; her *The Odyssey of Auden* appeared in *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse* in July 1945. Miss Lechlitner is the wife of the novelist Paul Corey.

MARYA ZATURENSKA (b. 1902) is the author of *Threshold and Hearth* (1934), *Cold Morning Sky* (1937), *The Listening Land-*

scape (1941) and *The Golden Mirror* (1944). Miss Zaturenska received the Pulitzer Prize for poetry in 1938. She is the wife of the poet Horace Gregory.

LANGSTON HUGHES (b. 1902) is the author of four distinguished volumes of poetry: *The Weary Blues* (1926), *Fine Clothes to the Jew* (1927), *The Dream Keeper* (1932), and *Shakespeare in Harlem* (1942). He is also the author of a collection of short stories, *The Ways of White Folks;* a novel, *Not Without Laughter*, and an autobiography, *The Big Sea*.

WALLACE STEVENS

Memorandum

The katy-dids at Ephrata return
But this time at another place.
It is the same sound, the same season,
But it is not Ephrata.

You said the dew falls in the blood.
The dew falls deep in the mind
On life itself and there the katy-dids
Keep whanging their brass wings. . . .

Say this to Pravda, tell the damned rag
That the peaches are slowly ripening.
Say that the American moon comes up
Cleansed clean of lousy Byzantium.

Say that in the clear Atlantic night
The plums are blue on the trees. The katy-dids
Bang cymbals as they used to do.
Millions hold millions in their arms.

Education is a Failure

The minor stupidities
of my world
dominate that world—
as when

with two bridges across
the river and one
closed for repairs
the other also

will be closed by the
authorities
for painting! But then
there is heaven

and the ideal state
closed also
before the aspiring soul.
I had rather

watch a cat walk through
a hedge with
another sitting by
while the bird

screams overhead
athrash
in the cover of the
low branches.

The Quality of Heaven

Without other cost than breath
and the poor soul
carried in the cage of the ribs
chirping shrilly

I walked in the garden. The
garden smelled of roses
the lilies' green throats opened
to yellow trumpets

that craved no sound and the rain
was fresh in my face
the air a sweet breath.
Yesterday
the heat was oppressive

dust clogged the leaves' green
and bees from
the near hive, parched to drink
at the bird-bath

overeager were drowned there
others replaced them
from which the birds were
frightened.
—the fleece-light air!

MARK VAN DOREN

False Summer

In the dead middle of the longest winter
There was an hour like this one, hot and still.
I can remember coming home by footpaths
Whitened as these, but not with daisy frill.

I can remember how the sun hung suddenly
Idle as I entered by the gate;
And flies from nowhere buzzed; and steadily, steadily
The eave troughs dripped, as if disconsolate.

But not so; that false summer was accepted
With the same happiness this true one hears.
Warmth rose, and water fell, and small musicians
Tumbled among the ghosts of the grass's spears.

If it was brief, so is the longest hay month,
When the sun dozes, dreaming that change is lost.
Time finds it with his terrible thin fingers,
That dice all day with honey and hoarfrost.

The Sun So Old

The sun so old, the day so short—
What is it gives the heart a start
As stumbling I look up and see
This dome that was not made for me?

Why not before, when just as much
My life was poor, time's life was rich?
Why is it even truth must trim
This moment of my knowing him?

For there he sits, immense at last,
And disappears into the east;
And overstares the stiffened bow
Of one too late at learning how.

GENEVIEVE TAGGARD

Fructus

Odour of algaroba, lure of release.
The smell of road lehua and the crisp scent of maile . . .
These words and images will help you after a little
Hypnotic words emerge and bloom in the mind,
Anæsthetic names. . . . Dry buzz of bees
Who make a honey eaten at early breakfast
From a comb like a broken coral. . . .
Do dreams foretell the honey? Break the spell.

So I come home in the valley of Kalihi,
My bare feet on hard earth, hybiscus with stamen-tongue
Twirled in my fingers like a paper wind-mill,
A wheel of colour, crimson, the petals large,
Kiss of the petal, tactile, light, intense. . . .

Now I am back again. I can touch the children:
My human race, in whom was a human dwelling,
Whose names are all the races—of one skin.
For so our games ran tacit, without blurr.

What brings me back with giant steps to them?
What was the feast that woke that fabulous thirst?
What was the summer fruit we found and ate
Boldly, with the children of Adam?

A game and a daily search
In the harvest of trees. We played a parable.
We possessed a valley, devoured the juicy, dense
Jewels of appetite hung in fresco sweeps
In garlands and in fountains toward the sea.

Mangoes of golden flesh, with turpentine
Peel and odour. Plums of inky stain
And the pucker of persimmons. Dates to be got
By stepping up a tree-trunk. Coconuts
With custard centres. Rose and custard apple,
Eugenia pink, lemon and little orange,
And the sacklike fig, to be ripped, to be seen, to be tasted.
How rasping sweet the suck of sugar-cane,—
Papaya and banana taken for granted.

With giant steps, in sleep and troubled pain
I return to the fabulous feast, the old communion,
With bodiless hunger and thirst. Why have I come
Away from the adult world where race is war?

Here we are dipping and passing the calabash
In the ceremony of friends; I also;
But in frenzy and pain distort
The simple need, knowing how blood is shed:
To sit together
Drinking the blue ocean, eating the sun
Like a fruit. . . .

ROLFE HUMPHRIES

Hell

Hell is a place of solitude enforced
On the great host, cut off by sorrow, going
Under a wind intolerably cold,
A wind from no direction, always blowing.

Hell is a place of everlasting noise,
Where voices, plaintive and obnoxious, cry
Over and over again their favourite word
In constant iteration: I, I, I.

Hell is a place where mirrors are black water,
And rivers salt, and atmosphere like lead,
Where suffering is all the rage and fashion,
And everything is dead, except the dead.

Hell is all right to visit, if we have to,
And hard enough to miss, in any case,
But, I insist, I would not like to live there,
Not if you gave me all the God-damned place.

RUTH LECHLITNER

To That Far Future

To that far future, winged, they came—
To the last frontier of glittering space:
These final voyagers with great bare heads
And listening eyes, these bold pursuing Davids
Whirling their pebbles at gigantic suns:

Who left behind them nations bled and broken,
Left the last starving exiles with their tales
Hell-written for the very meek in spirit,
Their history a child's small fumbling hand
At Time's great corded throat.

Into the radius of the burning rose,
The saltless universe they came,
The sea walls and the walls of earth forsaken;
Housed above wind and cloud their bones
Transfigured, and their blood consuming light.

Cradled in air the rootless young
Sung between star and star, whose ancestors
Set their small toes like nibbling hares in dew
On morning grass, their red mouths to the stain
Of summer-ripened berries;

Whose forefathers gave their body sweat
For bread and shelter, knew the smell of earth
Like the known flesh of women: valley, stream,
Companion hilltops; took the warm rain
Upon their shoulders, and the winter snow.

Long past these bonds were broken: broken then
Earth's excellent gift—the gift of gravity.
Winged to the upper world they came; their hands
Harnessed the cones of planets, read the course
Of stars like Braille spread to a blind god's touch.

Through the boxed batteries on their breasts
They spoke and listened, mind to mind
(Not mouth to mouth, nor heart to heart)
Tread the great upper paths of space
While the doomed earth sped onward toward its magnet.

Their tears and laughter with the four seasons lost
In long-forgotten time, they too became
A legend borne to the thinning arcs of light:
Their past a myth that men were once of Earth,
That men once fashioned wings and dwelt in air.

MARYA ZATURENSKA

The Gray Room

Into the mirrored room, her eyes glazed and remote
She walked silk shod upon cold,
Winter silver the summer gold
Death shivered in her fur coat.

All things she touched grew pure, austere
The china clock, the gilded chair
Assumed a rigid timeless air
The summer haze grew high and clear.

The curtains hung high, motionless
Through noontide windows the sun dial
Brimmed thick with dark. A little while
All things seemed dim, but her red silk streaming dress.

Through doors of glass and chill we heard,
That dreamy, gentle and inhuman
Voice that was not of mortal woman
Nor voice of angel, nor of bird.

We followed her through waves of frost,
And saw her multiple figures pass,
Floating through walls of ice and glass
The guardians of the trapped, tamed, lost.

'Why, why, chill lady fur-wrapped, virgin-cold
Does your red gown shed colour and flame,
Upon a fear that has no name,
Why turn to silver all our gold?

And why the silent, sidelong look
The glance that burns the world away,
Cold as the stream of a mountain brook
Yet vivid as the eye of day?'

Perdita's Song

Cast, cast, adrift, disowned, disowning
You seek your father and your mother
Too far from the safe womb,
You drift too long, and drift forever
Under the willow-weeping grove
Under the golden-gleaming orange tree
Where shall you find your home?

The storm in silent anguish rising
Will strike your island's sleeping heart,
The rescuers seek but have not found you
Soon the mastering tides will creep—
No voice may bless, no eyes behold
Your glassy fountain's bemused wonder
Beneath whose silenced charm you sleep.

Red is the moon, the clouds unfolding
The lovely view no eyes beholds,
Unshared the golden lamps of morning,
Unseen the silver bowl of night,
Where the stars fall, unloved, uncaring
Where no heart bleeds, where no tears fall
There let the great storm break.

LANGSTON HUGHES

Summer Evening

Calumet Avenue, Chicago

Mothers pass,
Sweet watermelon in a baby carriage,
Black seeds for eyes
And a rosepink mouth.
Pimps in grey go by,
Boots polished like a Murray head,
Or in reverse
Madam Walker
On their shoe tips.
I. W. Harper
Stops to listen to gospel songs
From a tent at the corner
Where the carnival is Christian.
Jitneys go by
Full of chime bones in dark glasses,
And a blind man plays an accordion
Gurgling Jericho.

Theresa Belle Aletha
Throws a toothpick from her window,
And the four bells she's awaiting
Do not ring, not even murmur.
But maybe before midnight
The tamale man will come by.
And if Uncle Mac brings beer
Night will pull its slack taut
And wrap a string around its finger
So as not to forget
Tomorrow is Monday.

A dime on these two bottles.
Yes, they are yours,
Too!

In another week
It will again
Be Sunday.

BRIARCLIFF QUARTERLY

EDITED BY NORMAN MACLEOD

Announces the

William Carlos Williams

Issue

VIVENNE KOCH, Guest Editor

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William Maclellan writes: 'Congratulations on the development of the *Briarcliff Quarterly*, which fills me with admiration. I hope that our pages will reflect some time that world consciousness which you achieve so magnificently.'

C. Wrey Gardiner, editor *Poetry Quarterly*, London, writes: 'May I say that I think that the *Briarcliff* is the most interesting magazine we get from America.'

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POEMS FROM THE FRENCH, POLISH AND CZECH

PAUL ELUARD

Poem

I have shut my eyes so I may see no more
And tears have sealed my eyes
That do not see you.

Where are your hands with their caressing fingers
Your eyes the daytime's four caprices
O you are lost quite lost No longer present
To fascinate the memory of night.

All over now and yet I still live on.

(Translated by DEREK STANFORD)

BLAISE CENDRARS

Islands

Islands
After islands
Where no boat shall ever land
Where no foot shall ever tread
Thick to the shore with vegetation
Islands crouched low like jaguars
Motionless
Mute
Unforgettable islands
Islands upon islands
Nameless for ever
With my shoes thrown overboard
I am longing to salute you.

(Translated by DEREK STANFORD)

JULES SUPERVIELLE

The Captive

Eyes in their lovely league
Of colour and watchfulness,
And lips that know so well
The bond that holds them still,
Arms always half-outstretched
And yet imprisoned in their universe
That no one notices but he
Who seeks you yet seems to flee.
A trunk that like a real tree
Stands upright in its leaves
That bud at his caressing gaze.
A dress that tries so hard
To know nothing definite
About the tender shape that hides within
But what it cannot help knowing.
Feet unravelling the tenuous
Complexity of their advance
Towards impossible deliverance
That has its source and strength
Upon your lips, and flows from them . . .
Pausing, in the street's open doorway,
To see if no one has seen you,
O you, the future or remembered
But for me the ever-present image and my love,
You stand now ready to depart,
But never, never, from the prison of your heart.

(Translated by JAMES KIRKUP)

G. M. PIETRKIEWICZ

Jealousy

The afternoon stretches its limbs,
yawns, lisps, fawns and bends down over the leaking hours
whose taps are dripping—monotonous rhythm,
when the bulging strokes of the night,
combing the bestial hair of the light
with teeth of their anger, have wearied we lovers.

Then the night casts her scales—denudes herself of the stars,
and, drowned to the waist, God marches, wading vindictive silence—
jealous
of animals ecstatic in half-angelic souls;
he gags our hearts with languid questions
/what?/
sets our eyes against our words
/what?/
and our hands on our lips:
/why?/.

(Translated from the Polish by J. H. SINGER)

FRANTIŠEK HALAS

Bitter Poem

The night was without wings
as if the wings could grow up out of shame
blushing desires bitter shudderings
on lips now lame

Yet tenderness tenderness to the end
by twitching hands her dreams were breaking
so rocking mothers over cradles bend
without awaking

(Translated from the Czech by KAREL OFFER)

Modern Scottish Poetry. Edited by MAURICE LINDSAY (Faber & Faber, 6s.).

The Scottish tragedy is not a public one: the fires of Scottish patriotism—fires that threw their weird and glorious illumination upon the historic scene—were damped by slow, economic conquest and not by the armies of the English invader. Defeat, inevitable as it was, did not at once follow upon the collapse of the '45—the fires that might, so it seemed, have sprung to life before the political genius of a Parnell, smouldered on, and were visible to an enemy who were swift to attack the very roots of Scottish civilization and social life. In the late nineteenth century the curtain of failure, richly brocaded with the romantic and fleeting figures of Scottish Kings, was drawn across a stage which, if not empty, had ceased to be of interest to actors and audience alike. True, the traditional scenery still stood—if Scotland was a corpse it was at least lying in state—but the age-long struggle for independence had come, almost imperceptibly, to an end, with England—English economy, English culture—supreme.

Burns was patriot and rebel, but what of Sir James Barry, Sir Walter Scott. . . . Were they, then, collaborators who had sold country and talent to the 'Suddron' foe? History, alas, does not permit us to make any such facile conclusion. Nevertheless, Robert Louis Stevenson's unfinished novel, 'Weir of Hermiston', was a death-bed confession of that suppressed Scottish make-up of which many a Scottish writer had been taught, by the 'occupation' to feel ashamed. 'Ours is an age', says Derek Stanford, 'of combines and conformity. All along the front the small concern is undermined, assimilated or suppressed by the bigger interest or power. From the small grocer and the small publisher to the small nation and culture the case remains the same. . . .'

Not the least of the problems of the modern Scottish poet is that of language. Where the English mind is fanciful, that of the Scot is often Gothic, fleshy and grotesque. Of this 'Scottishness', then, the native 'Lallans' (Lowland Scots) is more expressive than his adopted tongue. In his fascinating study, 'Scott and Scotland', Edwin Muir suggested that the Scottish writer would do well to dispense with the ailing Lallans and make English his sole medium of literary expression. It is only fair to postscript this view with the note that at least one English thinker is of the opinion that English itself is 'a dead language . . . destined to become the dialect of ill-paid

peons locked up in a large and rainy island'. Hugh MacDiarmid maintains, on the other hand, that the objection to the use of 'Lallans' is primarily a class one. Consequent, it is true, upon its being largely the speech of a proletariat, Lallans is a more emotional, less intellectual, language than English. 'Synthetic Scots', a development of Lallans introduced by MacDiarmid himself, has, however, solved the problem of modernizing the language to bring it into line with the present day. That 'Lallans' bears a marked resemblance to the Scottish landscape itself was once remarked to me by an Englishman who was otherwise uninitiated into the delights of 'Jamieson's Scottish Dictionary'.

Mr. Lindsay's anthology is a personal and not an authorized 'Baedeker' of the new poetic landscape. His aim, he says, has been to make a representative culling of the best fruits of the first twenty-five years of the Scottish Renaissance, with the bias, if any, in favour of the young. The bias, it seems, is in favour of Mr. Lindsay himself. Let me explain.

Hugh MacDiarmid is the arch-lyrist of the Renaissance. He calls to mind Mr. T. S. Eliot's description of P. Wyndham-Lewis as combining 'the mind of a civilized man with the energy of a savage'. Briefed, as it were, by his multifarious works, Scotland gave battle for her artistic independence. To use a term of reference which may perhaps be better understood by a Southern audience, MacDiarmid is a Scottish Yeats. Eight pages, then, of Mr. Lindsay's own verse serves merely to emphasize the fact that MacDiarmid is inadequately represented by only six.

Though the bulk of the poetry here included is in the Gaelic or Lallans, one is surprised by the number of young 'English' poets who turn out, like Byron, to be Scottish after all. G. S. Frazer and R. Crombie-Saunders appear as kiltless bards whose romanticism is the intelligent anti-party dress of the individual in a totalitarian age.

The romantic mind, like Wordsworth's Lucy, seems, if not eternally, then all too often

'rolled round in earth's diurnal courses
With rocks and stones and trees'

in untidy fashion. W. S. Graham, who is otherwise a promising poet, shows in at least two of the three poems by which he is here represented, a mind that is chaotically dispersed in the musical undertones of a personal and Scottish landscape.

To conclude, *Modern Scottish Poetry* contains, apart from those poets I have already mentioned, excellent work by Edwin Muir, Sydney Smith, Adam Drinan, J. F. Hendry and many others.

THE NOISE OUTSIDE

Get Away Old Man. A play by WILLIAM SAROYAN (Faber, 6s.).

William Saroyan is in love, in love with nearly everybody and with almost everything. Furthermore, he uses his sleeve as a blackboard on which to write his love letters. (P.S.—I like Saroyan very much indeed.) In England he will never be forgiven his exuberance. Left-wing editors won't like him, as he leads his love towards the dawn, not merely behind the office door. Underneath this excitable and at times no doubt undiscriminating love affair with every possibility of human goodness, which first tugged at the attention of our worried generation, when the young editors of a duplicated magazine in Paris published '70,000 Assyrians', which Saroyan has outrageously been carrying on for years, and which he persists in, throughout this play, there lies embedded a deep and perpetual faith in human decency. We can leave the sands to the literary gents, it is only on rock like this that real art can be built.

Throughout these years the cock has crowed, not three times, but at each hour's beginning and at the same hour's end. No one has gone low enough, not far enough away from fame, from leisure, or from privacy. Judas most men, Peter everybody. The means may be the only property Saroyan has, he has filed no claim to copyright the end, but at least his attitude can stop the cock from crowing. His plays may have no form, his stories may not be stories, his novel may have no discernible plot, but, however, he has, for longer than a decade now, given us ample raw material, that affords an adequate excuse for us to leave these insulted walls behind and to hurry out and build, clean and strong beneath a roof-like sun. Incidently, it seems slightly ludicrous to refer to him even at the dictates of the ordinary conventions of book reviewing as Mr. Saroyan, Sir William perhaps, certainly Brother Bill.

However, William Saroyan leaves the essential and basic ingredients of genuine writing lying around all over almost each page of every book he publishes, and he is as prolific as a Victorian novelist. There are, it is true, certain things that he lacks, but no one, not even with unlimited quantities of all of them, could produce a work of art. Saroyan is excited and in a hurry, he didn't have time to brush his hair or fix his tie before he came running down the dirty alleys of this decade to tell the world that the grass of human happiness was growing between the flag-stones. Maybe he was wrong, but it was indeed worth hearing, and it was deeply worth the telling.

This play, by a noisy but unpretentious young man with a talking heart, contains more of the stuff of true poetry on any one of its pages than do the collected works of many a contemporary highbrow. To read Saroyan one would think that the rainbow was an escalator mounting towards Utopia, and that to be alive gave one the right to be climbing it.

PAUL POTTS

AN AMERICAN POET

CONRAD AIKEN, *The Soldier* (Poetry London, 4s. 6d.); JOHN C. WHITEHEAD, *Flash and Outbreak* (Collins, 6s.).

'Conrad Aiken', the blurb says, 'has a reputation in the United States as one of their most prominent and excellent poets, and it is time he had a reputation as great here.' To be sure: but one does not make a reputation by announcement, and it does not seem likely that *The Soldier*, any more than Aiken's dozen other books of poems published in England, will find many admirers. It is, indeed, one of the least achievements of a considerable poet and novelist; and it is appropriate here, I think, to consider Mr. Aiken's total, and in this country almost totally ignored, achievement. His poems have not at any time caused great disturbance among English intellectuals; and two remarkable novels, *Blue Voyage* and *Great Circle* (with a less notable novel and some short stories) have dropped stealthily, like ladies' mistakes, into the thick pond of remainders. Perhaps somebody will hook them out one day.

Mr. Aiken's most marked characteristic as a poet is the melodious and near-Elizabethan quality of his lines and cadences; few poets have exploited so consistently a dying fall and feminine line-endings. This consistency is companioned by a certain monotony: the tone is the same, whether the note is elegiac:

> '*And I, and you—*
> *What winding sheet for us, what boards and bricks,*
> *What mummeries, candles, prayers, and pious frauds?*'

Or philosophical:

> '*magnificent pour of stars we call the world*
> *downward from nowhere forever to nothing.*'

Or romantic:

> '*It is a snowflake, which is like a star,*
> *And melts upon the hand; it is a cobweb*
> *Shot with silver that from the golden lip*
> *Of April's dandelion hangs to the grass.*'

And the fates of the characters in Mr. Aiken's early stories in verse, as Mr. Yvor Winters has pointed out, are rather monotonously the same; they jump off roofs and into rivers to escape from a world where the long hands of women are always cruel and their narrowed eyes are always fascinating—and where also the arrows of rain are always slanting down in the lamplight. It is all a little like Swinburne, and rather more like Dowson; but like Swinburne and Dowson with a difference.

The positive virtue of Mr. Aiken's poetry is that he alone in our time (but perhaps one should except Wallace Stevens) is able at his best to use this near-Elizabethan verse line to produce work which is not pastiche; which is genuinely majestic, or genuinely romantic, or genuinely lyrical. He is a poet who has not been well served by anthologists; if I were selecting the best of Mr. Aiken's poems I should not go much outside *Preludes for Memnon* (published here by Scribners in 1931, on imported sheets), a collection of poems most of them written generally in a standard measure which is handled with wonderful skill. The Preludes are linked together by a personal theme, but the links are loose enough for one to be able to consider them as separate poems, and to say that they are really first class in their romantic-philosophical-psychological kind. There is hardly one of these sixty-three poems that would not stand inclusion in any anthology of modern poetry.

The Soldier is another matter. Aiken writes best when he is moved by, or writing about, personal themes; least well when he is engaged with narrative poetry on philosophical subjects. *The Soldier*, to be frank about it, is often pretentious and sentimental:

> '*Over and over:*
> *from age to age, from generation to generation:*
> *man the unconquerable: you yourself; man the soldier.*'

This kind of dreary generalizing about past and future spatters most of the pages; and there is a passage on pages 34–35 identifying the civilian with military struggle, which is too embarrassing to quote. On the other side, it must be said that it is impossible for Aiken to write anything without touches of distinction; there are many beautiful images and phrases in *The Soldier*. 'The portents creaking in the creative hollow of midnight', 'The dream working in the rock', the wind that 'bayonetting the dog-grass/whines down, ricochetting, through pasture walls, and then/ runs swiftly over white waves to seaward.' Yes, there are fine things in *The Soldier;* perhaps it will serve as an introduction to Aiken's

work. I hope it will lead some readers back to *Preludes for Memnon* and *The Coming Forth by Day of Osiris Jones.*

Mr. Whitehead is just twenty-one. He is done too much honour by the publication of a book of verses which he will perhaps read with a blush in five years' time. At present, it must be said, he shows a little sensitiveness, and nothing notable in the way of an eye or an ear:

> *'The child that made the others laugh*
> *Aroused his mother's tears.'* (p. 13)
> *'The summer opens like a rose.'* (p. 32)
> *'But if she forgives me, then I pray*
> *She have tea ready when I come at last.'* (p. 43)

After reading these specimens of the art of sinking one turns back to *The Soldier* with a new appreciation. How few writers there are, after all, who have much feeling for words, and the way they are used. Very certainly, Mr. Aiken is one of them; just as certainly Mr. Whitehead, at present, is not.

JULIAN SYMONS

REFLECTIONS ON POETRY

Speaking generally, a good deal of the current talk about poetry and the poet appears wide of the mark. It is easy to see that the disputants rally to the fray with the eagerness of practitioners bent on scoring a point. There is a good deal of brandishing great names, and a feeble readiness to succumb too easily to fashions of thought. This age indeed is as prone as the nineteenth century, or the Middle Ages to assume that it has achieved finality. In face of the atomic discovery, this, ironically, may be true. Otherwise, it is a fatuous presumption. Poetry IS. It may, like vitamins, succumb to classification or definition. But it scarcely needs the perpetual sanction of a Freud or an Eliot, nor to make articulate a pitiable apologia for its survival. Again, a good deal of this current chatter is vitiated from the start by another detrimental, or to say the least of it, confusing habit of the times, that of defining one thing in terms of another, usually in terms of the most intimidating jargon to hand. This is carried to such excess, that, as if in despair, the intellectual contestants no longer dare evaluate on the criterion of what is 'good': they must speak of what is 'significant'. With reason, perhaps. For the good is relative, and possibly obscured by the more apparently evil exigencies of economics and parlour politics, the inner conflict of the poet, and the bogey of environment. Perhaps this mass of febrile and inadequate

chatter marks only a tentative stage after the explosion of many false values, towards the future integration of poetry and a reordered universe. Its effect, as all over-statement may be to render the minute and élite public, case-hardened, or contrariwise, to inhibit the young neophyte to the extent of paralysing him by formulæ, or deadening his individual vision. More fool he, if he refuses to challenge the encyclicals of any arbitrary authority.

I shall here avow an inclination to accept an absolute for poetry. I shall assume indeed that poetry is a vital function of man's existence, equally spiritual (and so more than a game) and concrete. In the last resort, it is a mystery, as all creation remains. It derives directly from the heart, which observes a certain rhythm; it is sporadic in its occurrence and form, since it depends for its utterance on peculiar circumstances. No doubt the best poetry is felt, though never written, owing to the conventional fear of giving public expression to the unfamiliar and the unknown. We shall have to add also, the inadequacy of language, which owing to the pressure of so many conventional activities, remains save in the case of a few outstanding pioneers, unreasonably static, and inert. Moreover, I shall be barefaced enough to affirm that poetry is mainly concerned with an inner life, however vividly some poems reproduce the world of objects. For the poet, as *instrument*, is motivated by an emotional urge, however rigidly he may decide to reduce the emotional content to a minimum. A religion of Art, as the painful history of certain epochs shows, becomes ultimately asphyxiating. Yet, mindful of the early associations of the two, poetry suffers whenever its function threatens to become degraded, as for instance, when it is regarded as a merely decorative adjunct of journalism. Needless to say, no great poet has consented to accept such a view of his vocation. Great poetry could inevitably be written only where the poet had the highest, and not the lowest conception of the value of his métier. And perhaps one of the reasons why so little great poetry is written in an excessively self-conscious age, is the fact of the poets having themselves to some extent acquiesced in a rather too low conception of their art, one which would have dismayed equally a Greek, an Elizabethan, or a Coleridge. They have too readily, as the result, listened to those whose primary concern does not appear to have been so much to write well, as to adjust themselves to the times or to attempt to justify their existence in the market-places.

Did I need to plead, I would plead for more of the workshop; less of the market-place. A familiar challenge to the poet who

observes the rule of silence and solitude is the bogey of the Ivory Tower. Isolation, true, is not for the immature. Some take longer to appropriate experience than others. But again, experience is a counsel suited to the under-forties, with the proviso, not only that they possess the capacity to experience, but the capacity to absorb and utilize this experience. A versatile talent will often invent, with more conviction, than a crude amateur will record. I think of Keats. Others may need a longer margin of time to achieve exactitude of diction. What matters in the first place is the training of the instrument. Some like Villon need to suffer first. There is no absolute law nor recipe, nor any necessary imputation of masochism. Pedantic scribblers become infatuated by the idea of a uniformity behind all phenomena, and the sport of relating one sequence to another, as, *e.g.*, narcissism to the use of the hendecasyllable, will one day be outmoded and give place to other 'discoveries'. The poet who possesses some of the discernment of the sage, will steer clear of becoming too involved, indiscreetly involved, in what is beyond his orbit. He will be 'in the know', as Shakespeare and Dante. His capability will, in proportion, be negative and not negligible.

To return a moment to the religious analogy. It is well known that poetry originated as a form of incantation, deriving from obscure sources in magic and primitive religion. In the daylight of a later civilization such a function necessarily underwent certain modifications, in accordance with social demands and puritanical taboos. The orthodox appropriated the form for hymnody; the heretical for mystical ideology. Poetry became sectional, as it was never in the heyday of Greece and Rome. The secularization of the drama gave the poets new impetus, and a more social *raison d'être*. The Elisabethan fusion with the concrete reintegrated art and human life. Subsequently the individual voice obtained a hearing, as in Blake and Shelley. It is always with the emancipation from dogma (Dante was a rebel) that poetry comes into its own right. It appears as the reaction of the individual against the oppressive rigour of standardization of thought or emotion, a reaction so strong that only such a vehicle as verse can successfully carry the strain, a reaction which poets may be excused if they interpret as a revelation.

It would appear that the balance between art and life is only threatened to the point of decadence or 'escapism' when the former in despair for its existence, threatens to annex a whole territory for itself. Hence the fate of the 'tragic generation' in the much-derided nineties. Yet there was much to justify the revolt, and the charge of

'decadence' only holds good when applied to the individual's limitations, *e.g.*, to Wilde, no doubt, though not to Valéry or Yeats, presumably, who were both survivors of a movement which aimed at separating poetry from the profane. And who indeed could argue that too great an alloy of 'vulgarity' is not detrimental to the spiritual vitality which poetry alone might be supposed to conserve. We need only to add that these values necessarily fluctuate; that now the æsthetic, now the social factor requires emphasis. And not only so, but as the form and fashion of life and feeling change, so æsthetic and social themselves, as terms signify various if not opposed qualities. For if *æsthetic* implied in 1890 London, lilies and Chopin on gilded terraces by moonlight, in 1906 Dublin, Molly Bloom and her personal washing, *social*, also in 1945 implies a will to co-operation in the recovery of civilized relationships between men and countries, but in any Utopia might conceivably mean a happy celebration of leisure, contemplation and festivity. And again, at the risk of appearing out of tune a little with the aspirations of many contemporary poets, I am obliged to affirm that little could effect more for the future health of society than if poets rose up who with frankness, vision and vigour set themselves the task of creating that future now in their work, and boldly insisted again on the positive elements of existence. For too long we have followed the march of time, and waited for the unphilantrophic politician to anticipate us, instal the era of justice, when it was ours to call the tune. Why be surprised then if the nihilist, for the moment, happens to hold the field?

In two ways at least I am of the opinion that the analogy (to put it at its mildest) between poetry and religion needs to be observed. First, because the effectual poet needs the stimulus of a sense of real vocation, a sense which with the current ascendancy of journalism radio and cinema (all undeniable assets of a complete culture, I grant) many poets are inclined to minimize, and so to underrate, the importance of their own contribution; hence, possibly, to take refuge in defeatism or the feeble reiteration of sentimental or social commonplaces. And further, without approximating to the more nauseous aspects of authoritarian discipline, the convinced poet will recognize an allegiance to his art and to his public, as the sincere priest to his Church and flock. The analogy, I recognize, will not be acclaimed with great favour, religion being, owing to many misconceptions, looked at askance in the most professedly progressive circles. I only define it here as a man's attitude to the totality of things, to himself, his fellows, his work,

and the mystery of existence. I own a horrible misconception may arise, that of the parched victim of a protracted fast or the sacerdotal scowl in the best Goya manner. And yet I adhere to a conception of the poet's mission which would differentiate more, confusing him less with the 'writer' or 'intellectual', less even with the prophet. And with certain reservations, that of priest serves me best.

Secondly, as to the efficacy of poetry. The need has been seen at least by some few to re-invest our social culture with myth, image, symbol. One poet has told us that 'poetry is not a sort of Holy Communion'. And the functions of poet and mystic, so easily confused, need to be carefully distinguished. But I do not think there is a shadow of doubt that for many, especially in times of crisis, poetry affords a spiritual satisfaction which otherwise is denied, since their attitude disallows them that orthodox allegiance which the participation in the sacraments requires. Such sectarian dilemmas disappear at once when it is recognized that religion and life are one. Then the question arises, not is it right to employ poetry as a substitute for religion, but rather of the quality of the poetry which is employed to appease this need. Communion with great minds, it might be advanced, is capable of effecting more than assistance in rites, which are based on effete or, at least, conjectural beliefs. And it might be pleaded even now, that despite the scarcity of great minds, their emergence in their turn need not be considered an impossibility.

But I do not wish to give the impression that I advocate, in any Tolstoyan sense, the limitation of art to what merely edifies or elevates. I believe there is a poetry which invigorates the spirit, as I believe there is also a form of music. There is a place equally for Ravel as for Bach; for Villon as for Rilke. And at length the analogy between poetry and religion breaks down since, ultimately, in its highly-developed form, religion implies obligations. And this art does not (in the case of the recipient or spectator, that is), or it would cease to be art. Let there at all costs be a place for satire, for narrative and comic verse. The threat to art comes never from pleasure (the whole nation is inextricably interwoven with the idea of an æsthetic pleasure), but from puritanism. And here the danger of art becoming harnessed to moral and political theory is a menace to freedom, a menace in fact to one of the very last strongholds of that idea, for none is free who is not internally free. And I believe it a great advance that much of the poetry of this century has a new and hitherto unconceived efficacy, in that it aids in those who possess the capacity to apprehend, the liberation of many inhibitions

and repressions, which deprive harassed men and women of mental comfort and harmonious living.

Hence I believe that the line of demarcation between the poetry of former ages and ours will continue to be more emphasized than before, even. For once again, the frontiers of poetry have been modified, in order to receive a new extension. The hieratic verse of Valéry, the later work of Yeats, the Surrealists, despite their special categories, are all symptomatic of this new direction. Hence, indeed, neither poet nor reader need be intimidated by the wanton image or the bugbear of obscurity. The type of poetry which will be efficacious in a complex society, newly aware of the obscurer strands of the human psyche, is a poetry which springs from the whole personality. Familiar with not only the obvious surface of life, in all its captivating variety, the poet of the new age must go forward in contemplation to explore the most distant and latent fields of existence. He will never again be content with correct feeling reactions, and to a simple theme, he will not be afraid to add such presentiments or crises which occur from the subconscious during his travail. He will attempt an even closer relation than before between concrete reality and spiritual truth. He will refuse any compromise between the dictatorship of fashion and his primary inspiration. He will flay the temptation to any weakness of reserve or restraint, and whilst not necessarily opposing science, he will not move in fear of intellectual *faux-pas*. His sincerity and power will be measured by a new type of qualified critic, competent to assess his value, without reference to academic rule of thumb, *parti-pris* or subjective preference. And so, not without a contest, the old and sadist snob criticism will be supplanted at last in favour of a more responsible and responsive type of judgment. This safeguard will at once afford protection to the genuine practitioner and the gullible public against the specious charlatan. For, incidentally, in the realm of poetry, what offends is never *originality* in genius, as is too often supposed, but the mean and exhibitionist desire to be singular. And this indeed is an affront to the art which, as Shelley insists, is primarily a mimetic one. For what, in an empirical sense, constitutes poetry in that in which poets resemble each other, and not that in which they differ. In view of the changed consciousness of this half of the century, and of the new responsibilities poetry now carries, I would plead for a basis of judgment rather in relation to his contemporaries than to his forbears.

This age has, as far as can be judged, achieved its own idiom and acquired its peculiar type of vision. Personally, I incline to the

view that for the moment more innovation would not be opportune. The next stage appears to me to be a stage of consolidation, of utilizing the new forms and idioms of the century in the interests of what has remained so far inexpressible. We can expect an occasional reversion to old modes; there will never be wanting poets whose pet diversion is to wallow in orgasms of self-pity. But the more conscious poet will rejoice in his place among those who know what the future can hold, if he must continue to inhabit an attic, and have no greater material security than Baudelaire or Blake. He may expect no respite from the charge that poetry is a luxury trade. All the better if he acquiesce. It is not for us all to assume the cowl of penance, nor as priests are we obliged to conduct ourselves as saints. He will rejoice that for him at least remains the privilege of being an individual, a privilege he will relentlessly defend. Above all he will be animated by the spirit of love (banished, I believe, from Bloomsbury in 1937) without which no arduous task can succeed. And whether his public be great or small, his reputation wide or negligible, he will, whilst working out his individual salvation, feel himself entitled not perhaps to glory, but to a place in a small team, schooled to challenge the invariable world of dullness and defeatism.

THOMAS GOOD

MUSIC AND POETRY

Music and poetry gatherings are held on the third Monday of every month at the Ethical Church Hall, 4A, Inverness Place, Queensway, Bayswater. Tea at 6.15 p.m. Meeting at 7 p.m.

On January 20th, T. S. Eliot's 'The Wasteland' will be read in its entirety by Mr. and Mrs. Clive Sansom.

The meetings are open to the public. Monthly programmes on application to: Alec Craig, 140, Holland Road, London, W.14.

CHRISTOPHER FRY, *The Firstborn* (Cambridge University Press, 6s.); HENRY TREECE, *How I See Apocalypse* (Lindsay Drummond, Ltd., 8s. 6d.); DOROTHY WELLESLEY, *Desert Wells* (Michael Joseph, Ltd., 6s.); HERBERT PALMER, *A Sword in the Desert* (George Harrap & Co., Ltd., 6s.); G. S. GORDON, *Robert Bridges* (Cambridge University Press, 1s. 6d.); JOHN BANTING, *A Blue Book of Conversation* (Editions Poetry London, 10s.).

This three-act verse-drama by Christopher Fry—author of the play, 'A Phœnix too Frequent'—is the kind of work that makes the grudging critic glad he has kept his superlatives locked up. They can now be employed for a fitting occasion.

To burn one's boat with jubilation, then—I know of no other play in verse, where the needs of the stage and of poetry meet—excepting, perhaps, 'The Cenci' of Shelley—equal to *The Firstborn* since Shakespeare's day. Beside it, the dramas of Byron and Beddoes are pageants of ranting and recitation, and even the fine work of Mr. Eliot is a little stiff, a trifle too posed, a cut between oratorio and masque.

The theme of the play is Moses' mission; his task of freeing the Israelites and of leading them safely out of Egypt.

From the first we see the oil of suspense rising in the gauge of anticipation. Pharaoh's daughter and his sister are walking on the palace-terrace when they hear a cry from the Pyramids:

> 'ANATH: *What was it, Teusret?*
> TEUSRET: *Did you hear it, too?*
> ANATH: *Some man is dead. That scream was password to a grave. Look there: up go the birds. . . .*'

Such is the tempo of his work; mounting towards that awful midnight when all the first-born Egyptian children are struck with a sudden deadly plague, and Moses—looking on Pharaoh's son, the young dead Ramases whom he loved—summarizes the tragedy of power and revenge by saying:

> '*I do not know why the necessity of God*
> *Should feed on grief; but it seems so.*'

Throughout, the language of the play is perfectly attuned to the moment and the speaker. Tense: as when Anath says of the Pyra-

mids, 'What pains they take to house a family of dust'; stern: as when Pharaoh says of his son, 'He must learn to abdicate/His heart and let the needs of Egypt rule there'; poignant: as when Moses explains his return to Egypt, 'My blood heard my blood weeping/Far off like the swimming of fear under the sea,/The sobbing at night below the garden'; and deeply, contritely contemplative: when Moses says after Ramases' death, 'Have we to say that truth is only punishment?'

Along with Michael Tippett's 'A Child of Our Time' and T. S. Eliot's 'Four Quartets', *The Firstborn* of Christopher Fry strikes me as being the only full-scale and first-rate art produced in England during these last ten heart-weary years. An herculean conception perfectly achieved, it weds the powerful to the sensitive, leaving us with the clear impression of something colossal, exquisite and unprecious.

The answer to the title of this second book is 'a trifle superficially'. Perhaps the name was unfortunately chosen; for those who look inside to find a comprehensive exposition of the neo-Apocalyptic Movement will come away with small gleanings, wishing that Hendry had been the author.

When this is said, remission may be granted; for the volume is, in fact, a sheaf of loose essays held together by aid of the binder and a common informing spirit.

Of these, the weighty non-literary studies are the least satisfactory: 'Growing up in Wartime', the title essay, and 'Considerations of Revolt' have all worn somewhat stale by now, while the theme of 'With Tree as Unity' has been more philosophically expounded by Herbert Read in 'Annals of Innocence and Experience', and more melodiously by Henry Miller in his essay, 'The Tree of Life and Death .

Did I not use the word 'remission'? Well, now the time has come for it. Henry Treece readily admits his first function is that of poet; and when he comes to write of the verse of Dylan Thomas, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Tennyson and Read he proves himself an interesting critic of the 'inside works' of prosody, and a sound picker of winners from the stables of quotation.

In an essay on meaning in poetry he gets quite warm in his hunt-the-thimble effort to establish a ready rule-of-thumb æsthetic. A certain slightness of mind, however, and an unenergetic use of logic force him to terminate the chase prematurely.

In all, an entertaining work; the more immediately readable, perhaps, for its aura of easy cheerful glibness.

With six books of verse behind her, Dorothy Wellesley—protégée of Yeats, and poetess in her own right—has a claim on the learned attentive ear.

In her volume *Desert Wells* this claim is made in a modest fashion with the discreet allure of the minor-key. Combining a strange humility of spirit with a certain hauteur of mind, her verse at its best has a slender iced perfection, a grace of formally attenuated fire.

In some of her clearest moments of writing a keen directness of expression gives rise to the lyrically epigrammatic:

> '*A broken heart is but a whore*
> *When love lies in the grave.*

The finest flower of this bouquet is that which gives the book its title. Here the author attains to a fluency of line which her formal severity often forbids:

> '*Strangely I heard them babble, water and bells,*
> *In the waste, in the desert, far in the desert forlorn,*
> *Water like music, music like water welling.*

The fuggy Victorian reading-public—fed on Old Testament tactics *ad nauseam*—were always duly appreciative when some sour and venerable sage of letters rose in full prophetic wrath to denounce his degenerate juniors of the pen. Innoculated by Lytton Strachey, we find the trick no longer works. Grandpa, of course, is entitled to his tantrums, but we cannot accept them as Sinaitic.

Such is rather the case with Herbert Palmer. At sixty-six he has still to learn the gracious 'art of growing old .

Like Walter Savage Landor, he knows how to hate; but unlike that earlier Homeric misanthropist, he lacks the pivot of aloof disdain. He seems to believe, like the former, that none are worth his strife; and yet he has striven with a great display of shrillness.

The poems appearing in *A Sword in the Desert* are poems we have heard time and time again. They are what we might define as formula verses; poetry written to a recipe grown stale. More diverting by far are the remarks which Mr. Palmer makes in his introductory essay, 'The Present State of English Poetry'. From this we learn many interesting things: namely, that Eliot, Donne, Rimbaud, Mallarmé, Rilke and Yeats have their 'arresting moments'; that the Georgians were 'moon-worshippers'; and that what we need is more barrel-organs.

Excalibur had better go back to the lake.

Poet-Laureates have proved a mixed lot. Along with Tennyson,

Jonson and Spencer we have to count Cibber, Southey and Dobson. Somewhere between these unequal groups the work of Robert Bridges must stand.

Setting aside his early lyrics (a kind of conscious birdsong art), his more ambitious writing is best explained as the acme of rentier Eton-Oxford culture.

This task has been made the easier by an address on Bridges (the Rede lecture at Cambridge for 1931). Already the lecture seems to belong to an epoch more leisured, refined and fainéant—last fruit of Edwardian causerie and charm. The late Mr. Gordon's account of Bridges is rather a gentleman's account of a gentleman than a critic's pronouncement on a poet.

In this, perhaps, we find a clue to the weakness of both the lecturer and his subject. Art is interpreted in the terms of Country House Platonism; liberal æsthetics for ample incomes; culture concomitant with nuts and wine. Limited as such an attitude must be, it comes as an amusing change after the endless earnest reams of the Marxist two-way Procrustean method.

Did ever James Joyce, Ronald Firbank and Gertrude Stein meet together one glorious pre-Munich small-hour morning, and there—amidst the caviare, truffles and champagne—dash off 'a blue book of conversation'?

Or again, with his spacious alternate pages of blue abnormal illustration and merely orthodox black print, the author might be 'having us on toast'; baiting the reader with irascible penguins.

Ostensibly, the volume is a 'savage' skit on Mayfair social economy; the kind of book Evelyn Waugh might have published had he taken drawing-lessons and gone Surrealist for a tidy spell.

Here is just a tiny smear of the pâté-de-foie-gras in which the book abounds:

> '*He would have a wee platinum radio mounted in his ear, you see, and ultra-violet ray jam in every room of our wee wee town love nest.*'

If Mr. Banting is truly the author of this Belgravian Gulliver's Travels he is certainly a master of the cultural snigger. A case of 'Ha-Ha among the tea-cups' or perhaps the more esoteric 'Tee-Hee'.

DEREK STANFORD

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POET UNDER SATURN

PAUL VERLAINE, *Poèmes Saturniens* (The Centaur Press, 5s.).

Some of Verlaine's early work was published in Louis-Xavier Ricard's *Revue du Progrès*, and in *Art*, edited by Ricaud and Catulle Mendès. It was in *Art* that the sonnet 'Nevermore' first appeared and, in other issues of this weekly revue of eight pages, his appreciation of Baudelaire and an attack on Barbey d'Aurevilly. Eight poems by Verlaine appeared in the second issue of *Parnasse*, the successor to *Art*. Barbey d'Aurevilly revenged himself in a review in which he said 'Verlaine . . . is a puritan Baudelaire—an unfortunate and comic combination lacking the brilliant talents of M. Baudelaire and with occasional reflections of Hugo and de Musset'.

Verlaine's first collection of poems was *Poèmes Saturniens*, of which a small edition of less than 500 copies was published in 1866 at the expense of his cousin Elisa. He was nearly twenty-two at that time and the collection ranged from poems written at school to those which had already appeared in revues. His choice of title is explained in his introduction in which he says that those born beneath the lurid sign of Saturn are predestined to misfortune and melancholy, 'Leur plan de vie étant dessiné ligne à ligne Par la logique d'une Influence maligne'. In it the debt to Baudelaire is apparent, but the prologue which follows has the flamboyance of Hugo and Leconte de Lisle.

Melancholia, the first section consisting of eight sonnets, is also Baudelairean. The next part, five poems under the heading *Eaux-Fortes*, is slight in content, but I think that 'Marine' and 'Cauchemar' foreshadow his later poetical development. Of the last two sections, *Paysages tristes* and *Caprices*, it is in the former that Verlaine first revealed his mastery of the music of words. *Paysages tristes* include two poems now established as anthology-pieces—'Chanson d'automne' and 'Nuit du Walpurgis classique'.

The collection caused no great stir at the time, although Verlaine received advice and criticism from Sainte-Beuve and the customary praise from a great height by Hugo. Mallarmé alone seems to have assessed genuinely the merits of the poems and the promise they held. I believe, however, that many copies of this first edition remained unsold, so little effect did they have upon the French intellectuals of the time.

The Centaur Press should be congratulated upon this new edition, so commendably free from all editorial comment. In this fiftieth year since the death of Verlaine a new edition of his first poems, as they stand and without trimmings, is an excellent commemoration. I hope that *Poèmes Saturniens* will be followed by similar editions of the rest of Verlaine's poems. ROLAND GANT

THE POETRY OF OS MARRON

Os Marron was born in Lancashire in 1916. He died in Mansfield Victoria Hospital on August 30th, 1946. I first saw his name on a manuscript sent to *Poetry Folios* a couple of years ago, the work of someone who was obviously beginning to write for the first, or possibly the second, time. Since then his technical power developed at such a speed that I was certain that he was under some almost unbearable stress, even before he told me of his illness. Although I never met him I came to consider him as a personal friend—he was so egregiously sane. When one is dying of tuberculosis and knows it, one can become distorted mentally and artistically into all the familiar, pathological forms—cynicism, panic, euphoria: Marron held his poetry firmly in the direction he wanted it to go. His only comment on his own calamities was the terse and dignified *The Tears*—at least he wasn't 'standing milk turned sour'. His longing for his small daughter, whom, since he was an 'open' case, he couldn't see, produced one poem—apart from that, he seemed to shrink from using verse to settle his own problems.

It is hard to assess fairly when a writer dies young, and one finds oneself looking for the sort of comment that one would wish made about oneself—something designed to make a handful of poems

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do duty for a life-work. I know what Marron would have thought of any attempt to convert him into a hard-luck story, and I never yet printed anyone out of sympathy. It is fair to say, I think, that he has left a dozen poems as good as any in the magazines and the anthologies, that he made them do what he wanted them to do, and that in his *From the North Country* he wrote something which is not far off a masterpiece. It is full of echoes, because when one's landscape is physically limited the last book read cannot be put out of mind, but the poem is the story of himself.

> '*Who love are never bound, never bend,*
> *and those who dream, dream in freedom.*
> *The stone of grey days will not close on us*
> *but always the sun, a bell over the wood*
> *manœuvres into cover every lover . . .*
> *and we are in a hollow breast, a cave of leaves*
> *blue light in glory from gentleness . . .*'

I do not think one can speculate on what Marron would have written if he had lived. If he had lived he probably would not have written at all. I think he accomplished what he set out to accomplish. What he has written should not be forgotten.

ALEX COMFORT

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